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ABSTRACT

With employees in many organizations now expected to act as if they are self-employed in order to preserve their employability, managers need to assume new responsibilities to provide career coaching. Some outputs of career coaching are education of staff in career self-management, guidance of staff in the use of career analysis and planning methods, staff taking career enrichment initiatives, and information input by staff into their manager's succession planning. Managers' roles in career support include the following seven activities: (1) being available for both informal and informal discussions with employees about their careers; (2) appraising employees' performance and providing advice regarding their strengths and development needs; (3) guiding employees through their career planning process; (4) providing information that will assist employees to develop career plans or access information they need in order to understand what options are available to them; (5) making employees available for planned career moves that will help the organization to meet its resourcing requirements; (6) ensuring that the appropriate skills are developed within the organization to meet current and future needs; and (7) tracking the trends within the industry and employees' occupations in order to provide meaningful advice and guidance. In order to be effective coaches, managers must learn how to do their own career planning first. Career coaching processes are most successful when they originate from employees and are respectful of their needs. The more that managers can educate and support their employees to take responsibility for their own careers, the more likely they are to develop productive and motivated work teams. (KC)

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by Paul Stevens

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Gaining Commitment to Change through Career Coaching

by Paul Stevens, Founder / Director, The Worklife Network

The pace of change is accelerating and competition intensifying within the work environment. 'Re-engineering' and changing technology are causing constant upheaval in the workplace. Organisations are in a recurring state of flux trying to survive and succeed amidst this change. Corporate restructuring has people working harder but not always effectively. They are under such pressure that there is limited time to think innovatively.

Too much attention is being paid to systems and work in process flows with little to the feelings and concerns of those involved. Personal success and development opportunities for individuals are not being commingled with business enterprise success. These are the very issues that often undermine such change programs.

Employees are now expected to act as if they are self-employed in order to preserve their employability. They need to analyse what they want, what they can contribute and provide career action step proposals regularly to their manager that suit altered circumstances. Neglect of this threatens their job security.

What role has their manager in this? Where can career coaching by managers help? Worklife has been providing career coaching training to managers for ten years. Some of our learning follows.

Effective career coaching begins with an understanding of the factors that affect an employee's career. These factors influence not only their current job attitudes, but also play a major role in the plans employees make for the future, plans they may not share with others without a supportive career coaching process.

When employees feel more secure about managing their own careers, they cooperate and contribute better to the needs of the work unit.

Among the key responsibilities of a manager is to motivate and develop employees to meet the organisation's changing needs for skills, knowledge and competencies. As the subject of 'my career' is so sensitive to staff, career coaching is essential. It involves teaching employees how to manage their own careers and develop an understanding of and commitment to career self-reliance. Then supporting them as they integrate their goals and plans with the needs of the organisation and their work unit.

When employees feel more secure about managing their own careers, they cooperate and contribute better to the needs of the work unit

Desirable outputs

Before expecting their active involvement in career coaching, we need to educate line managers first, reason with them about the beneficial outputs and reduce their reaction that this is another imposition on their busy schedule from the HRM function.

Some of the outputs from career coaching are:

- Staff are educated in career self-management empowering them to take responsibility for their own career mobility and continued employability
- Staff are guided in the use of career analysis and planning methods, so enhancing their

Worklife has been providing in-company career and life planning training since 1983. In the past year nearly 100 workshops have been facilitated. Career development support strategies have been designed in partnership with more than 22 organisations since 1995 for their employees and executive management objectives.

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self-confidence and developing a deeper partnership between their changing individual needs and the goals of their work unit

- Staff take career enrichment initiatives that result in increased work satisfaction, improved relationships with colleagues and greater productivity
- Better quality information input by staff into their manager's succession planning

Career coaching is a learning partnership between a manager and their staff for optimising individual career success, contribution to work unit problem solving and group accomplishments. It is not managing their careers.

Manager's role in career support

As a manager, the main role is to be available for both informal and formal discussions with employees about their careers. Figure 1 indicates what it isn't.

Other aspects include:

- Appraising the employee's performance and providing advice regarding their strengths and development needs
- Guiding the employee through their career planning process. A coach shows the way and points out both opportunities and potential pitfalls
- Providing information that will assist the employee to develop their career plan or access the information that they need in order to understand what options are available to them
- Helping the employee to assess the career plans that they develop so that they are realistic. This may involve helping the employee understand the merits and obstacles of certain career action step directions
- Making employees available for planned career moves that will help the organisation to meet its resourcing requirements
- In addition, all managers are responsible for ensuring that the appropriate skills are developed within the organisation to meet current and future needs
- Tracking the trends within the industry and your occupation so that you can provide meaningful advice and guidance

Figure 1 — 'Is and Isn'ts' of Career Coaching

Manager's role is:	Manager's role isn't:
✔ Guiding and coaching	✘ Dictating
✔ Supplying resources	✘ Being critical
✔ Listening	✘ Taking responsibility for employee's decisions
✔ Giving honest feedback on objectives and behaviours	✘ About giving guarantees
✔ Providing a reality check	✘ Supplying unlimited resources
✔ Sponsoring employee's career development	✘ Being an expert in career and life management counselling
✔ Helping with balancing employee's and organisation's needs	

Self-reliant career behaviour

Career coaching requires an understanding of the self-reliant career development process. This process is the lifelong activity of assessing where you are in your career, deciding where you want to go and developing the plans necessary to achieve your goals.

Career planning undertaken by an employee is the management of surprise. In other words, their readiness to adjust to often rapid and unexpected changing organisational circumstances by maintaining an inventory of preferred skills, needs, values, primary wants and desired new learning.

Self-reliant career behaviour is essentially a self-assessment discovery-based concept. Staff initiate their own exploration of career options by applying detective, communication and research skills. It requires self-sufficiency in the employee, but does not preclude the need for, in fact, requires help from others during the career planning journey.

One output is that staff produce and create their own approaches according to the distinctive features of their own situations. They pragmatically develop or select whatever will help them get where they want to be. When circumstances change, they have the flexibility to try something else.

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Many staff experience difficulties with self-management through a process of this nature. They may want a speedy resolution to their career issues, a 'quick fix'. Some will not experiment adequately with the activities required before concluding that they do not need to follow it or that this effort is unappealing. Reluctance to share personal thoughts, concerns and aspirations with their manager in discussion or in writing will deter some. Some need to be propelled to undertake this effort by a recent setback in their career or personal life.

Promoting career self-resiliency in employees by managers is no easy task. Often with superior knowledge of the organisation, the manager's inclination is to tell the person what they need or should seek. A skilled career coach avoids this and facilitates the knowledge search by the employee.

Our training experiences

Our experiences training line managers in career coaching are:

- how to do their own career planning must be taught first
- who is responsible for what in career development needs to be made very clear
- managers accept well how career coaching integrates with performance management, conflict resolution, staffing issues, succession planning and skills analysis
- managers need to focus on people's anxieties and dreams as well as the business requirements
- it is unreasonable to expect all line managers will develop into effective coaches
- managers need a clear template for their role behaviours and structured simulated practice before buying into the process (see Figure 2)

Figure 2 — Coaching Roles

Self-Assessment Facilitator
- Assists the employee to assess skills, interests, values, motivations and constraints
- Selects conscientiously instruments which suit nature of employee and their quest

Information Provider
- Shares relevant world-of-work knowledge
- Provides print information applicable to transition nature
- Communicates where additional data is obtainable

Referral Agent
- Refers employee to other skilled helpers where need is beyond your skill or the charter of the relationship
- Refers employee to specific books and other sources of information

Guide
- Guides employee in interpretation of data about self and their environment
- Illustrates what is needed at each stage of transition making
- Clarifies expectations about what you as helper will do and what employee does for self

Coach
- Tutors the employee in writing a career action step proposal (CASP)
- Coaches the employee in how to manage their career and implement their CASP

Companion
- Provides aura of empathy, confidence building and sustained interest in the employee's well-being
- Maintains employee data as confidential
- Motivates, cajoles, praises and celebrates significant progress events

It is unreasonable to expect all line managers will develop into effective coaches

There is considerable overlap in the six roles in Figure 2 and what an effective manager already does supervising others. A manager may sometimes use one role or several in the same discussion. The skill as a career coach is to select the role(s) that is the most helpful for the employee's issues at a given time.

Coaching effectiveness

Career coaching emphasises the importance of current job performance being satisfactory or better, in order to earn support for career progress intentions. It encourages employees to think beyond promotion as the only path to success. Worklife teaches that every employee has 10 career action options, only one of which is promotion. It is our view that this generation of employees has a wider range of choice, now that a framework has evolved for many new ways for working. Career ladders and job titles have been replaced by options to develop

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competencies by planned moves through a succession of roles.

Career coaching also teaches employees how to manage change by helping them to be more adaptable to unforeseen events that happen in their worklife. It is moving employees towards the implementation of their plans, providing they also meet the employer's wants.

Career action step proposal

A key focus of a manager's career coaching is to motivate the employee to undertake sufficient self-review and exploration so that they can confidently complete a Career Action Step Proposal. This is a written proposal for what career enhancement the person wishes to accomplish in the short-term.

The important factor is that as the employee conveys clearly what they are seeking approval for, they also specify what they are prepared to contribute to its realisation.

A manager's career coaching provides assessment of the stated development needs; the pragmatism of the proposed support needs; the level of agreement and support to the proposed development requests; whether the employee has developed a sufficiently flexible strategy that incorporates more than one career action option.

Bottom up succession planning works better

In the current intensely dynamic work environment, employers feel the pressure to identify the levels of essential skills, knowledge and career aspirations required of everyone they employ, i.e. an inventory of talent and deficiencies.

What succession planning is really about is ensuring teams of people are in readiness for contingencies, organisational expansion or contraction, for entering new markets, for handling changes in the nature of technology with which the business operates.

If a manager does not find out the real, rather than the assumed, career expectations of their staff, the manager may not have a reliable inventory or staffing succession plan. How will you, as their manager, know them unless you ask them? And ask them again at regular intervals. Just as organisations change, employees also change as they journey through their lives.

When an employee has implemented a career option, time goes by, and they reflect on their work and life events and may find their primary wants have shifted. Most likely, a different next step option will be chosen than the one previously selected. Knowing the direction in which a good performing employee is inclining is critical to retaining their services and achieving succession planning as a workable practice. Consequently, career coaching is an ongoing activity.

When employees submit their Career Action Step Proposals, management has a better idea of who wants what. By assisting employees to communicate their career direction support needs—what they seek and why they believe they merit it—the hazards of assigning staff to tasks and projects and also of succession planning are substantially reduced.

Managers are the pivotal link between the employee, the organisation and the employer's career support program. Their role in career coaching is not easy, quick or always comfortable, but the more a manager can educate and support their employees to take responsibility for their own careers, the more likely they are to develop productive and motivated work teams. This should be the goal of every manager. It also provides a very special type of personal reward — helping another human grow.

This article is published in the interests of promoting best practice in the provision of support to adults in their career management and life transitions and to enhance their contributions to those who employ them.

Other monographs in this series:

- What Works and What Doesn't in Career Devt Programs
- Bottom Up Succession Planning Works Better
- The Worklife Methodology: A Framework for Career Transition Making
- Career Self-Help Centres: An HRM Initiative with Distinct ROI
- Why Implement a Career Development System?
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